

BOTTICELLI

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY



3 1761 03713 1950




ND
B 659B

MASTERPIECES IN COLOUR

459B

A. J. Bell

Vic. Coll.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/botticelli00binn_0

MASTERPIECES
IN COLOUR
EDITED BY - -
T. LEMAN HARE

BOTTICELLI

IN THE SAME SERIES

ARTIST.	AUTHOR.
VELAZQUEZ.	S. L. BENSUSAN.
REYNOLDS.	S. L. BENSUSAN.
TURNER.	C. LEWIS HIND.
ROMNEY.	C. LEWIS HIND.
GREUZE.	ALYS EYRE MACKLIN.
BOTTICELLI.	HENRY B. BINNS.
ROSSETTI.	LUCIEN PISSARRO.
BELLINI.	GEORGE HAY.
FRA ANGELICO.	JAMES MASON.
REMBRANDT.	JOSEF ISRAELS.
LEIGHTON.	A. LYS BALDRY.
RAPHAEL.	PAUL G. KONODY.
HOLMAN HUNT.	MARY E. COLERIDGE.
TITIAN.	S. L. BENSUSAN.
CARLO DOLCI.	GEORGE HAY.
LUINI.	JAMES MASON.
TINTORETTO.	S. L. BENSUSAN.

Others in Preparation.

**PLATE I.—THE BIRTH OF VENUS. From the
tempera on canvas in the Uffizi. (Frontispiece)**

This picture is generally regarded as the supreme achievement of Botticelli's genius. It was probably painted about 1485, after his return from Rome. The canvas measures 5 ft. 8 in. by 9 ft. 1 in., so that the figures are nearly life size. No reproduction can do justice to the exquisite delicacy of expression in the original. Something of the same quality will be found in the "Mars and Venus" in the National Gallery, which was probably painted about the same time. The two figures on the left are usually described as Zephyrus and Zephyritis, representing the south and south-west winds: that on the right may be one of the Hours of Homer's Hymn, or possibly the Spring.



BOTTICELLI

BY HENRY BRYAN BINNS
ILLUSTRATED WITH EIGHT
REPRODUCTIONS IN COLOUR



LONDON: T. C. & E. C. JACK
NEW YORK: FREDERICK A. STOKES CO.

6538

53729

16-12-33

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate

I. The Birth of Venus	Frontispiece
From the tempera on canvas in the Uffizi	
II. Spring	Page 14
From the tempera on wood in the Florence Academy	
III. Portrait of a Man	24
From the panel in the Florence Academy	
IV. The Madonna of the Magnificat, known also as the Coronation of the Virgin .	34
From the tondo in the Uffizi	
V. The Madonna of the Pomegranate .	40
From the tondo in the Uffizi	
VI. The Annunciation	50
From the panel in the Uffizi	
VII. The Virgin and Child with St. John and an Angel	60
From the panel in the National Gallery	
VIII. The Virgin and Child by an Open Window	70
From the panel in the National Gallery	



FROM Florence, in the second half of the fifteenth century, men looked into a new dawn. When the Turk took Constantinople in 1453, the "glory that was Greece" was carried to her by fleeing scholars, and she became for one brilliant generation the home of that Platonic worship of beauty and

philosophy which had been so long an exile from the hearts of men. I say Platonic, because it was especially to Plato, the mystic, that she turned, possessed still by something of the mystical intensity of her own great poet, himself an exile. When, in 1444, Pope Eugenius left her to return to Rome, Florence was ready to welcome this new wanderer, the spirit of the ancient world. And the almost childish wonder with which she received that august guest is evident in all the marvellous work of the years that followed, in none more than in that of Sandro Botticelli.

He, indeed, was born in the very year of that new advent, lived through the period of its sunshine into one of storms—Stygian darkness and frightful flashes of light—and went down at last, an old broken man, staggering between two crutches, to his grave. His times were those of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who was a few years his

**PLATE II.—SPRING. (From the tempera on wood
in the Florence Academy)**

The date of this painting is much debated. It may probably be about 1478, before the Roman visit. It is somewhat larger than the "Venus," but the figures are of similar size. Reading from the left they are usually described as Mercury, the Three Graces, Venus, Primavera the Spring-maiden, Flora, and Zephyrus. The robed Venus is in striking contrast with that of the later picture.



junior, the unacknowledged despot of the Tuscan Republic, a prince, cold and hard as steel, worthy to be an example for young Macchiavelli, yet none the less a poet, and a devoted lover both of philosophy and of all beautiful things.

It was an age when a new synthesis was being made, and old enemies reconciled, so that men were less ready then to blame than to admire, and the best feeling of the time was that of reverent wonder. It is this which, more than any other painter, Botticelli has expressed for us. His pictures are living witnesses to the reverence which, in his day, the mystery of human life evoked in spirits such as his.

But while this is true, and true in the first degree of Sandro and his work, they express besides other moods, and betray other influences. The later quattrocento was the time not only of Lorenzo and the Platonists, but of Savonarola also, the last

great figure of the Middle Ages, strangely proclaiming the new days; and with him, of foreign incursions into Italy and Florence, of violence and all the black-brood of religious and civil strife. And at the end of those days came Michael Angelo, whose sombre masculine genius stands in such striking contrast to all the subtle grace and wistful gladness of Botticelli.

But Botticelli, who was of the circle of the neo-Platonists, was also among those who loved the friar of Ferrara; if he was the friend of Leonardo da Vinci he was associated also with Michael Angelo. In his life, and in the work which is the expression of that life, we can read plainly the perplexity and the discords, as well as the new and arresting harmonies of that time. His wonder is not all a glad reverence; it is sometimes, and increasingly, a poignant questioning of the sibyls.

I

The life of the painter appears to have been uneventful, and all that is known of him can be told in little space. His father was a Florentine tanner, and his elder brother followed the same trade, and was nicknamed Botticello, "little barrel." The family patronymic was dei Filipepi, but the painter signed himself "Sandro di Mariano," the latter being his father's name. Sandro (Alexander) was, perhaps, the son of a second marriage, for he was young enough to have been the child of his brother Giovanni, the tanner, whose nickname became affixed to him. He was probably born in 1444, in a house close to All Saints (Ognissanti) Cemetery in the present Via della Porcellana. His father was now in middle life, and a prosperous man. The lad was delicate, quick and wilful, perhaps a spoilt child. He was older than usual

when he went at about fifteen into a goldsmith's shop, doubtless that of Antonio his second brother. But he was not long contented there. A year or two later he was studying painting under that famous friar, Fra Filippo Lippi. Unless Browning has misunderstood the Carmelite Brother, the worship of beauty was his real religion; and, mere child of nature as he was, he sought to tell the significance which he found in her face—not indeed by the mere illustration of theological doctrine and pietistic conception, but by the transcription in pure line and perfect colour of a language that had for him no other words.

The friar was living in the neighbouring city of Prato, painting frescoes in the Cathedral, when Sandro joined him and became his favourite pupil. How long he remained with his master is uncertain, but it is probable that the fruitful relationship continued until after he came of age.

Perhaps he was twenty-four when he returned to Florence, and became associated with the brothers Pollajuolo, for whom, in 1470, he executed the first commission of which we have record. But as he was now twenty-six, this cannot be his earliest work. There is a hillside shrine near Settignano, which contains a Madonna—Madonna della Vannella—formerly ascribed to the friar, but which is now believed to be one of the earliest efforts of his pupil. And in the National Gallery the long panel of the “Adoration” officially ascribed to “Filippino Lippi” has by general consent been transferred to Sandro, and assigned to the period before his association with the Pollajuoli.

Here it should be said that none of Botticelli's paintings is clearly signed and dated; and even indirect documentary proofs are wanting in the case of the majority of his works. Much has therefore to be decided

by the doubtful and highly technical tests of internal evidence. These are rendered more difficult by the receptivity of this artist, who came late to maturity and was throughout his life profoundly affected by external influence; but on the other hand, his work has certain mannerisms as well as excellences special to it, which even his imitators and students failed to reproduce.

The brothers Piero and Antonio Pollajuolo exercised a profound influence over the young artist. Filippo had taught him to paint emotion—the Pollajuoli were masters in another school, and sought to delineate physical force. There is a little panel by Antonio in the Uffizi, of Hercules and the Hydra, in which every line is almost incredibly tense with the expression of energy—the fierce muscular swing and clutch of struggle. To some extent Sandro was already a man standing upon his own

feet; and the scientific studies of anatomy and perspective in which he was now encouraged, increased his power of expression without distracting it from its proper purpose.

In 1469 Fra Filippo died, and three years later his son Filippino, then fourteen years old, became Sandro's pupil. From this it would appear that by 1472, when he was twenty-eight years of age, Botticelli had left the Pollajuoli, and had a workshop, or bottega, of his own, in the family house where the income-tax returns of 1480 describe him as still working. Here in 1473 Lorenzo the Magnificent, who four years earlier had become master of Florence, commissioned him to paint a St. Sebastian; and from this time forward the Medici gave him frequent proofs of their appreciation. In the following year he went to Pisa, where he had some prospect of a large commission. This, however, fell through; he failed, Vasari

tells us, to satisfy himself in his trial picture of the Assumption of the Virgin, a subject not well suited to his mind. Instead he returned home and painted a banner of Pallas, for Lorenzo's younger brother Giuliano, the idol of Florence, to carry in the magnificent tournament of January 1475. The banner has been lost, but it marks a point of departure in Sandro's art; as a banner, it recalls the fact that the artist was also a craftsman, and introduced a new method of making such things; the new patron, too, whose life and love were alike destined to so brief a course, whose personality was so vivid and so knightly, exercised no little influence on the painter; but most of all we note the changed theme, first among those classical subjects which the artist was in a special sense to make his own. Botticelli painted portraits both of Giuliano dei Medici and his adored lady, Simonetta, the beautiful young wife of Marco Vespucci;

**PLATE III.—PORTRAIT OF A MAN. (From the
panel in the Florence Academy)**

This portrait of a young man holding a medal of Cosimo dei Medici is interestingly related to the only other undisputed separate portrait of Sandro's, that in the National Gallery. It is supposed to represent Giovanni, younger son of Cosimo, who died in 1461: if this be correct the portrait cannot have been painted by Botticelli for several years after its subject's death. There is little convincing evidence on the matter. The panel measures 21 by 14 inches.



and, though these are lost, it is generally believed that Simonetta's lovely and innocent charm of face and character inspired many of his happiest fancies. She died in 1476, and two years later, Giuliano was assassinated during Mass in the Duomo. Sandro was employed by his brother—who himself had narrowly escaped death on the same occasion—to commemorate the assassins' shame by painting their portraits on the face of the Palazzo Publico. A task more suited to his temper was the celebration of Lorenzo's diplomatic success, when in 1479 he succeeded in detaching the King of Naples from a hostile alliance against Florence. This occasioned the painting of "Pallas and the Centaur," now on the walls of the Pitti, one of Sandro's most consummate pieces of decorative work.

The enumeration of these commissions shows that the artist had become closely associated with the Medici. Lorenzo's

palace and country villas were at this time the centre of the most brilliant group of scholars, philosophers, poets, and artists in the world. In this atmosphere Botticelli's genius came to flower. He appears, moreover, to have enjoyed the friendship of Leonardo da Vinci, a man eight years his junior, who had been studying in Verocchio's workshop, hard by that of the Pollajuoli. His was a spirit yet more subtle than Sandro's own—subtle even with the subtlety of the serpent—and the two men must have understood one another intimately. Botticelli himself was a pleasant, even a jovial man, but a man of moods. Like Leonardo he never married.

Another contemporary, very different from Leonardo, with whom Sandro was brought into frequent contact, was Ghirlandajo, the dexterous genre illustrator, decorator, and popular realist. Ghirlandajo's work is, in its essentials, the antithesis of Sandro's,

but it is marked by great journalistic talent. Crowded with interest for the Florentines, it brought its author an immense success. In 1480 both he and Botticelli were painting together in the Church of All Saints, and at the close of the year they were both invited to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV. to decorate his new (Sixtine) Chapel. Thither they repaired with their assistants and other artists, probably remaining there during the greater part of the next three years. Sandro is believed to have had some general oversight or arrangement of the whole work, while he himself contributed certain portraits of Popes, and three great frescoes occupying nearly a thousand square feet of the chapel walls. During his prolonged stay in Rome he must also have painted some easel pictures; one, an "Adoration of the Magi," is now in St. Petersburg. This Roman interlude in his Florentine life, marked by direct rivalry and daily contact

with artists of genius different from his own, is in every respect central in his story. He was now in his maturity, a man approaching forty years of age, working on a conspicuous task, in that Eternal City to which the greatest sons of Florence were ever the foremost to offer spiritual homage.

But it may be doubted whether the task itself was calculated to evoke his highest powers and most characteristic qualities. Neither in its subjects, its scale, nor the conditions under which it was accomplished, was it well suited to Sandro's genius, and while the frescoes contain noble passages and inimitable illustrations of his art, they cannot be regarded as among his masterpieces.

The frescoes were completed and the chapel opened in August 1483. Vasari tells what great renown, above that of all his fellows in the work, Sandro gained in

Rome, and what large sums he received and squandered there. Before settling again in his own city, he worked with Ghirlandajo upon the decorations of the Medici Villa at Volterra.

From 1480 to 1490 he was probably regarded as the greatest of living masters in Florence, and was busy with many commissions. To this period belong several of his greatest works, probably the "Birth of Venus," greatest of them all, with the Madonnas of the Pomegranate and of St. Barnabas, certainly the Lemmi frescoes and the Bardi Madonna. Venus and the frescoes are in the perfect manner which characterises his classical subjects. The others are marked by some decline in technical handling. But in saying this, one must add that Sandro's work is, in all periods, amazingly unequal, alike in execution and conception. One almost wishes indeed that Vasari's dictum, that he worked "when he was

mind," was even more true than it appears to be. For Sandro's subtle, wilful, whimsical genius hardly ever expressed its true nature in mere rivalry with other artists, or in the service of ecclesiastical patrons. Yet his undisputed works are too few, hardly fifty in all, for us really to wish any away. Even the panels of the St. Barnabas predella, and the tondo of the Ambrosiana Madonna can hardly be spared.

We come now to the later and stormier years of his life and work—years dominated for him and for Florence by the figure of the Dominican Prior of San Marco. Savonarola had already been for a time in the city, but it was not till 1490 that he made it his home, and began to fill it, as he was soon to fill the whole world, with his prophetic denunciations of corruption both in the Republic and in the Church. 1492 saw not only the death of Lorenzo, and with

him of the golden age in Florence, but the enthronement of a Borgia as Father of the Church. It was the end of an epoch. For a few years the prior held the city by the power and fascination of his inspired personality. He welcomed Charles VIII. of France as a new Cyrus, the sword of the Lord, restorer and protector of the liberties of the Republic; and when the king and his army became a public menace, it was he who bade them on their way. In 1496 he was at grips with the Pope. But two years later he had lost his hold upon Florence, and died upon the gallows amid the ferocious yells of the populace.

Sandro, the poet-painter, was less happy than Pico della Mirandola, the beautiful marvellous youth, who had died at the beginning of these troubles wrapped in a friar's cloak, the beloved follower of the lion-hearted preacher. His own brother

Simone, with whom he lived, was one of the Frate's followers, and suffered exile for his cause. There can be no doubt that he himself was profoundly influenced by Savonarola. After the tragedy of May 23, 1498, his workshop became a rendezvous for the many unemployed artists who had sympathised with the lost cause; and during the long evenings, those men would talk together of the dead days when "Christ was King of Florence." Sandro lived on for more than a decade, through evil days. Ghirlandajo had died in the same year as Pico, when Charles had entered the city: in 1504 his own pupil Filippino preceded him to the grave. The Pollajuoli were dead; Leonardo was but an occasional visitor, while Michael Angelo was dividing his time between Florence and Rome. In 1504 Botticelli was one of the artists consulted as to the position which should be allotted to the great sculptor's "David." He

**PLATE IV.—THE MADONNA OF THE MAGNIFICAT,
KNOWN ALSO AS THE CORONATION OF THE
VIRGIN. (From the tondo in the Uffizi)**

Probably painted about 1479, this is the most perfect example of Botticelli's circular pictures. The lines of the composition have been compared with those of the corolla of an open rose. The colour is rich and harmonious, and every detail exquisitely finished. The Virgin is still writing her song of the Magnificat, while the Child handles a symbolic pomegranate. The tondo is 44 inches in diameter.



still shared some small property with his brother, but his principal patrons were dead, the times were out of joint, and he was seeking consolation in the study of Dante. A folio volume of drawings by his hand, illustrating the Divine Comedy, remains uncompleted; whether owing to the death of him for whom it was intended, or of the artist himself, we cannot tell. Sandro died on May 17, 1510, and was buried in All Saints.

II

Botticelli was a Florentine in as intimate a sense as was Dante himself, and nowhere but in his native city can his work be fully appreciated. It is true that notable examples of his art have been carried away from time to time to other places, and that pictures attributed to him are still more

widely scattered. Boston has one of his most beautiful early works, the Madonna formerly belonging to Prince Chigi, for the sale of which to America the unpatriotic Prince was heavily fined; St. Petersburg has an "Adoration of the Magi" belonging to Sandro's years in Rome. The St. Sebastian painted for Lorenzo has found its way to Berlin, where there is besides the Bardi Madonna; the badly damaged frescoes celebrating the wedding of Lorenzo Tornabuoni are at the head of a staircase in the Louvre; Rome has the Sixtine frescoes; Milan has two Madonnas; Bergamo has a panel; while our own National Gallery has five works, ranging from the earliest to the latest period.

But it is in Florence that all but a small minority of Sandro's masterpieces are to be found, and it is in Florence that one first really comes under the spell of the magician. There, in the Uffizi, in the Sala

de Lorenzo Monaco, in the holy company of Fra Angelico's saints and angels, is Sandro's masterpiece, "The Birth of Venus." It is a large canvas painted in tempera:¹ but a horizontal join just apparent and running right across the picture, together with the medium used, gives it at first sight the appearance of being executed upon wood. It is in the pale cool colours of early morning, enriched by the heavy red of the robe which is about to embrace the wanderer's lovely form. There is a great sense of space behind her, over the grey sea. All about her the wind blows, making the light very clean and clear. She stands upon the edge of the great gleaming shell which has carried her, tilting it down with her weight as she leans forward to step

¹ Though his contemporaries were beginning to use the new medium of oil for their easel paintings, Botticelli adhered to *tempera*, or distemper, in which yolk of egg was generally the vehicle employed. Nearly all his pictures, except, of course, his frescoes, are upon wood. The "Pallas and the Centaur," "Venus," and "Nativity" (1500) are however on prepared canvas.

ashore. Her figure, tall, slender, and quite central in the picture, feels the wind and light about it, but not shrinkingly. It floats and moves, yet without consciousness of movement, as if it were a somnambulist moving across the sea. The pearly luminous quality of this living ethereal body, the heavy golden tresses of the long hair that hang heavily against the wind, which with one hand she holds, while she lays the other dreamily on her breast,—these are in the most perfect harmony with that flower-like immortal wistfulness which Sandro has put into her face. In striking contrast with this sea-born vision of Love, this strange visitant from an unknown world, stands the comparatively prosaic maiden who welcomes her and is about to wrap her in a rich mantle. This earth maiden, the representative of the Spring, in her pale gown sprigged with cornflowers, and her long plaits of dark hair, is garlanded, like the goddess in “Pallas

**PLATE V.—THE MADONNA OF THE POME-
GRANATE. (From the tondo in the Uffizi)**

A companion to the earlier tondo, this was probably not painted before Sandro's return from Rome, about the same time as the "Venus." It is broader in treatment and of more sombre colour than the "Magnificat." The eyes of the Child, who raises his hand in blessing, look straight out of the picture, in marked contrast to the attitude of the earlier work. There is a striking resemblance in many details, but the two pictures are quite distinct in character and feeling. This tondo measures 56 inches.



and the Centaur," with olive branches. The curves of the mantle, which she holds out against the boisterous wind, make a delicious line that balances that of the "Venus." After the figure of the goddess, however, who really is no Venus, but rather the Muse of Sandro's art, the ideal of his aspirations—after her figure, the interest of the picture lies in the intricate whirl of living lines, of dark wings, pale limbs, and delicately coloured scarfs, with which Botticelli has symbolised the winds of Spring, stirring up the water with their feet and blowing the voyager on her way.

Any attempt to convey by description the mystical significance of this decorative design would obviously be idle. Yet to miss that significance is to miss all. Regarded as the mere illustration of some verse of Politian's, or of Homer's hymn, the picture is open to endless criticism—the figure of Venus is out of drawing; the

promontories, waves, and laurel trees are bare shorthand notes. It is when the spirit in the onlooker responds to the spirit entangled in the magical lines and tones and colours of the painting, that its indefinable beauty dawns upon him. You must love Botticelli's drawing if you are to understand it.

In the same room hangs a smaller picture, very different in style, an "Adoration of the Kings"—a masterpiece too, and worthy of the closest study, but worlds removed from the "Venus." It is very highly and deliberately finished, and unlike its companion, belongs to the years before Sandro worked in Rome. It contains portraits of the Medicis and, more important to us, of the painter himself.¹ Detached from the

¹ There are two separate portraits by Sandro which are full of character and interest: the portrait of a youth in our National Gallery, and of a man holding a medal in the Florence Academy. Other portraits, such as those of Giuliano dei Medici at Berlin and Bergamo, and of Simonetta, may have come from his workshop, but are not now numbered among the master's own works.

others he stands in the right-hand corner, under the peacock, wrapped in an orange mantle, gazing at us over his shoulder—a tall figure of a man with powerful enigmatic face. The composition of this picture, with its thirty figures and varied colouring, has been often and rightly praised. In spite of the clear individualisation of personalities and the elaboration of magnificent accessories, the unity and balance of design with its semi-circular grouping and the nobility and distinction of its lines, are well kept. If it was painted in rivalry with Ghirlandajo, for whose work it was at one time mistaken, it is marked by an intensity of realisation foreign to that worthy painter.

These two pictures of the Sala di Lorenzo Monaco, the "Venus" and the "Adoration," are representative of the two realms in which Sandro worked; the one, of pure imagination, wedding Platonic ideas with a new conception of the possibilities of decorative

art; the other, of the patrons and atmosphere of fifteenth-century Florence. Very few of his pictures belong exclusively to the one realm or the other, but to one or other belongs the influence which predominates in any one. Of the first class are notably the remaining works painted with classical motives. Foremost among these is the "Spring" of the Florence Academy, with its inimitable group of the Graces dancing in a marvellous rhythm of flowing intertwining lines, somewhat over-mannered, it is true, and with feeling a little forced, but yet of quite unique grace and intensity of conception. Much wordy debate over the literary signification of this painting has come between the vital meaning of the design and those who behold it. We may find suggestions in Lucian or Alberti, in Politian's or Lorenzo's verses, but as a work of art it derives only secondarily from any of these. It is a representation of beauty

in a whimsical and even bizarre group of figures gleaming whitely under the dark trees between whose trunks shines the pale serene sky, while the grass through which their delicately modelled feet are moving is rich and full of flowers. This picture, in which the figures are nearly life size, while it has much in common with the "Venus," belongs to an earlier period, and is probably nearer in date to the "Adoration" already described, painted when the artist was about thirty-four years old.

Some two years later he painted his "Pallas and the Centaur." The figure of the goddess, beautiful as it is, lacks something of the vitality and motion of the "Spring" and the "Venus"; perhaps the artist has given too much thought to the lovely wreathing of the symbolic olive boughs about her breast and arms and head; but on the other hand, the melan-

choly Centaur whom she leads by his heavy forelock is one of the most perfect expressions of his art. It is among the peculiar qualities of Sandro that he makes one feel, in looking at this picture, that it is one's own hand which grasps those dark curling locks; just as in the "Venus" one is conscious of the light and the wind falling upon one's own body. Behind the Centaur rises a mass of sculptured overhanging rocks, beyond lies a boat in the bay. Almost always there is some note of vista and distance in Botticelli's pictures. The colour of this large canvas is very pleasing. Pallas is clad in a loose green mantle and an under-robe of white adorned with the triple rings of the Medici; she is wreathed with olive, her auburn hair blows out behind her, and her feet are covered with a sort of orange buskin. Nothing could be finer than the contrast she presents with the dark, wild, pathetic

figure of "Chaos and Old Night" whom she is leading captive.

The most beautiful of Sandro's earlier works, a little panel only 10 inches by 8, representing the return of Judith to Bethulia after the slaying of Holofernes, is in the Uffizi. It has suffered from repainting, the figure of Judith having been shortened and its movement limited by the drawing back of the right foot at least half an inch, so that it does not now correspond with that of Abra following so close behind with her horrid burden; but in spite of this, it retains a wonderful joyous serenity of light, line, and colour, and the same windy clearness of air and buoyant rhythmical movement as distinguishes the "Venus." The figure of Judith is so closely related to that of the Fortezza, painted for the Pollajuoli in 1470, and exhibited in the same gallery, that it may well belong to the years immediately succeeding it,

when Sandro was between twenty-six and thirty years of age. The companion panel of Holofernes, though interesting, is much inferior as a design and is somewhat comic in its frank and ghastly violence; it was evidently painted while the artist was under the influence of the Pollajuoli.

There are two other masterpieces which belong to this division of Sandro's work, but they are neither of them in Florence. The beautiful, but sadly mutilated fresco of Giovanna Tornabuoni, with Venus and the Graces, long hidden under coats of whitewash in a villa near Fiesole, was discovered in 1873 by Dr. Lemmi, then its owner, and carefully cleaned and removed. In 1882 it was acquired by the French government. In spite of the blank patches, and the great cracks which break its surface, this remains one of the most gracious and captivating of Sandro's works. It has the joyousness of flower-like colour, the breadth

**PLATE VI.—THE ANNUNCIATION. (From the
panel in the Uffizi)**

This interesting picture is probably only in part the work of Botticelli. It seems to have been produced in his workshop about 1490 for the monks of Cestello. It is less harmonious and convincing in colour than Sandro's masterpieces, but is redeemed by the living movement expressed in the figure of Gabriel, which is usually regarded as his work. This figure is related to two others of his angels, one in the Ambrosiana tondo, the other in the predella of the "Coronation."



and simplicity of treatment, and withal the virginal quality which, in his best moments, were characteristic of the artist. The masterly contrast between the flowing moving lines and strange symbolic faces of the four visitors, and the upright demure girl with the kerchief on her head who receives them is very striking. The second fresco, of Giovanna's husband, Lorenzo, introduced into the company of the Liberal Arts and Philosophy, is less interesting. A third fell to pieces immediately after discovery. All were painted about the year 1486, probably a little later than the "Venus."

The remaining picture of this group is the so-called "Mars and Venus" in our own National Gallery, a long panel designed to stand above a doorway, and probably painted about the same time as the more famous "Spring." As in the case of that picture, its subject has been a matter of much ingenious conjecture. Some commentators

see in the two figures portrait studies of Giuliano dei Medici, and of Simonetta Vespucci, and conceive that the sleeping Giuliano is dreaming of his lady, formerly clad in all the panoply of Pallas, but now disarmed by laughing loves. It is obvious, however, that the armour belongs to the man who lies asleep leaning upon some of it. The little satyrs with their roguish baby faces, curly goats' flanks, and budding horns, who play with the warrior's lance and helm, blow the conch in his ear, and wriggle through his breastplate, seem to have been suggested by a passage in Lucian describing the marriage of Alexander. But the subject of the picture need not now detain us, nor need the long outstretched figure of the dreaming warrior; its charm is in the exquisitely realised youthful grace of the lady in her long white robe, leaning upon a crimson cushion with the dark grove of laurels behind her. She is of the same

spiritual family as the Graces, and the central figure of Venus in the "Spring." She may indeed be Simonetta, perhaps Simonetta already deceased, of whom her lover dreams; but, whatever her name, her face and figure, and from her the whole picture, is radiant with that singleness and intensity of artistic conception, which gives to some of Sandro's pictures the power of suggesting a sort of immortality of life. And they have a surcharge of meaning, an enigmatic quality like that of life itself, which is seen in no other pictures of the time with the exception of Leonardo's—and in Sandro's the enigma suggests no sinister solution. His women are creations of passionate love and human intimacy, but withal they have an abiding quality which only a very reverent and chaste lover, a lover not unlike Pico della Mirandola, could have adored and chosen. The date of this picture is not quite certain, about 1478. The lady's face is

curiously related to the faces in the Lemmi fresco described above.

III

We must turn to the principal pictures in Botticelli's other, and as I think, inferior manner, indicating first, however, the links which exist between the two groups.

The first of these is the "Calumny," painted according to the description given in Alberti's *Treatise on Painting* of a picture by Apelles. It is a comparatively small panel, two feet by three, containing ten figures, and an elaborate background of sculptured marble arches, literally covered with friezes and bas-reliefs. It belongs to Sandro's later years, and is marred by a busy and somewhat theatrical violence. One can hardly look without laughing at the helpless boyish figure of Innocence, with crossed ankles and folded hands, dragged along dancingly by the

ladylike Calumny; and unfortunately, these form the central motive. Their poses mar a little the detached nude figure of Truth, standing on the extreme left with arm up-raised and noble face lifted to heaven. She is intimately related to the figure of Venus Anadyomene—but here she seems tragically out of place. The fancy lavished upon the bas-reliefs bears witness to Sandro's whimsical imagination even in the midst, as we may suppose, of the dark days when Florence was full of the false spirit suggested in this panel.

With the "Calumny" I must mention, though only in passing, the several panels of the life of Saint Zenobius, two of which are in the collection of Dr. Ludwig Mond. Less theatrical, but often more violent in manner than the "Calumny," and not less definitely of the genre character of illustration, they contain some pleasing colour, geranium reds, soft greys, and mauves,

blues, and much white. These, with the illustrative panels from the stories of Virginia and Lucretia, were probably painted after 1490, for wedding chests.

A more important group of pictures comprises the six—including the “Adoration” already described—which centre in the three figures of the Holy Family, whether they be called Adorations or Nativities; and the Sixtine frescoes. All these pictures are full of figures, most of them are set in large, carefully studied landscapes, which seem to challenge Leonardo’s assertion that Botticelli was indifferent to this part of his art. The two most pleasing compositions, after the aforesaid “Adoration”—the “Adoration” now in St. Petersburg, and the “Scenes from the Life of Moses” in the Sixtine Chapel, were painted about the same time in Rome. In the former, the Holy Family is housed, as in the tondo in the National Gallery, under a wooden shed erected

between the ruined pillars of an older order, a temple or perhaps a palace of kings. It contains some forty figures, besides horses, which Sandro loved to introduce, not always very successfully, into his pictures. Too often, like the charger of Holofernes, they are studied not from life, but from some other model: occasionally, as for example in the Medicean "Adoration," one recognises the real creature. This St. Petersburg "Adoration" is broadly conceived, and full of interest, but it suffers from that conscious and obvious emotion which belongs to Sandro's inferior work. In his best, his figures are pure creations, certain of their purpose, confident of conveying a sense of beauty transcending mere subject-interest; they are not life-like, they are ideas and symbols of life, and therefore able to convey the spiritual contact of living forms. This is not the case in any of the Adorations I am describing,

nor is it in any of the Sixtine frescoes if we except that of "Moses at the Well."

But in this marvellous central scene of a large fresco, the very sheep are so intensely realised as to have an individuality over and above their mere sheepiness. By the well, under the great oak tree of the Papal (Rovere) family, Moses is pouring water into the troughs for Zipporah and her sister. His long luxuriant hair falls about a sensitive face. Behind and below him are the sheep, so woolly that you can in fancy pass your hand over their fleeces. On the opposite side of the well are the two Midianitish maidens, standing out, the bright central motive of the whole design; one with her back turned and hands extended, the other walking in a sort of dream, her head drooping forward under the long thick locks of its heavy hair. A skin full of fruit is slung round her waist, and a distaff is in her hand. About this group, whose lines

**PLATE VII.—THE VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ST.
JOHN AND AN ANGEL. (From the panel in the National
Gallery)**

This beautiful painting is ascribed to Botticelli in the official catalogue of the National Gallery. Whatever may be decided as to its authenticity, it was evidently produced under his influence.



follow those of the well-mouth, the painter has contrived to introduce half-a-dozen other incidents from Moses' life. It was of the little terrier in this picture that Ruskin wrote: "Without any doubt I can assert to you that there is not any other such piece of animal painting in the world—so brief, intense, vivid, and absolutely balanced in truth: as tenderly drawn as if it had been a saint, yet as humorously as Landseer's Lord Chancellor Poodle." He is sure that the dog has been barking all the morning at Moses.

I quote this because it is almost the only passage of Ruskin's which is true to Botticelli's work. Sandro's "Venus" is a creative spirit, she is not a mere individual, but a living Platonic Idea; and through his power of realisation, this little terrier, a mere accessory in the foreground of a great fresco filled with details, has a life of its own. Thus, at its best, his work is not

representation at all, nor mere illustration ; it is the re-creation in a new medium of the creatures and ideas he has conceived, even to their least characteristics.

The two other Sixtine frescoes represent the "Punishment of Korah," painted in celebration of the revolt and suicide of the Archbishop of Krain ; and that known either as the "Leper's Offering," or the "Temptation of Christ," which was also intended to flatter the sensibilities of the Pope.

IV

We now come to the second great division of Sandro's pictures, his Madonnas and Saints, tondos, panels, and altar-pieces, painted for different patrons at intervals during his lifetime. The most celebrated of these are the two tondos, or round panels, of Mary with the Child and several

young angels, hanging opposite to one another in the Uffizi. Somewhat similar in design, they are yet essentially different. From its style, the first was probably painted about 1479, and the second in the same period as the "Venus," and the "Bardi Madonna" (1484-1485); the two pictures being thus separated by Sandro's sojourn in Rome. The earlier, that of the "Magnificat," is more brilliant and varied in colour, and of consummate finish: Mary's face is related to that of the "Pallas"; between her and the group of angels on the left is a distant landscape with curving river; behind her shoulder, supporting on one side the celestial crown, which is so much too large to rest upon her head, is a beautiful young angel of a distinctive type which hardly recurs in Sandro's work. This composition, with its intricately curved, and unobtrusively harmonious lines, so perfectly adapted to the circular form, has often

been praised. In the later tondo, the Madonna with the Pomegranate, there is no distant scene, but the sense of infinite vista is conveyed by the far-away, pensive expression, not only of the central figure with her slender drooping shoulders, but, as I think, of the Child himself. The grouping is simple, but less perfect than in the earlier work; and there is a lack of harmony between the secular little beings with their wings, flowers, and singing books, and the rapt Mother and Child, which we did not feel in the other, where Madonna herself, guided by the Babe, is writing her song of praise. But here Botticelli has concentrated the religious feeling of the picture in Mary's face, and in it he has struck again the mystical note which vibrates through the whole of his "Venus." Much has been said of the misery of this Madonna; for myself, I see in her face far more of the rapt vision of one

who sees immortal things in a mystery. She is not glad because of them, but her whole thought and being is separated by them from the things that change, being set upon the things that endure.

With these two tondos, I must mention for beauty and unity of conception the "Chigi" Madonna and that in the Poldo-Pezzoli Gallery at Milan. The former is generally regarded as among his earlier works. An open casement shows a river winding among wooded hills, a church steeple having been painted in as an after-thought. Mary's attitude, as she fingers the ears of corn thrust among the grapes in the bowl presented by a mysterious garlanded angel, is not unlike that of the "Magnificat," to which the whole composition is related. But Mary herself is of a very different type, more nearly related to the Madonna at Milan of which I shall now speak. She, also, is seated by a

window, and like her sister of the "Magnificat" she is reading in a missal with decipherable words. As in that picture too, the Child looks up at her with his hand on hers, a crown of thorns circling his chubby wrist. The colour is rich and harmonious; Mary being magnificently coiffed and clad.

Another Madonna in Milan, that in the Ambrosiana Gallery, bears some resemblance both to the Virgin just described, and to her of the "Magnificat." As in the Poldo-Pezzoli Madonna, the glories are either repainted or unusually elaborate, and Mary has a star embroidered on her left shoulder. Here again is the open missal, but now quite undecipherable, resting upon a cushion. It is possible to conceive of the Babe being another version of that in the Poldo-Pezzoli picture. But this Ambrosiana Madonna with her unimaginative face and uncompromising attitude, this grotesquely sentimental Child, these three spiritless atti-

tudinising angels prancing about on their errands, is perhaps the least pleasing or characteristic of all the works now attributed to the master. The picture is conventional to a degree; a great canopy hangs in space over the Virgin, between its curtains are seen the hills, towers, and river of a distant scene.¹

A somewhat similar canopy overhangs the Virgin in the Madonna of St. Barnabas in the Florentine Academy. Here, too, angels are holding back the curtains, while others display the crown of thorns and the nails. Mary sits on a raised throne worked with elaborate bas-reliefs. Before her, with their backs to her and the Child, are six saints, among them, with beautiful face, but rather

¹ The "Annunciation" in the Uffizi, is an interesting but doubtful work. The figure of Gabriel is closely related to two others of Sandro's; one the angel supporting the Child in the Ambrosian Madonna, the other the Gabriel in the Predella to the Coronation. But in the larger work the angel is much more fully realised; in face he is nearest in type to the beautiful angel already noted in the tondo of the "Magnificat," but graver. The colour of the picture is hard, crude, and unpleasing. It is supposed to have been painted about 1490.

bunchy figure, St. Catherine. Similarly elaborate and enthroned, though this time under a canopy of palm, is the Bardi "Madonna with the two Saints John" at Berlin. This, perhaps the most elaborately detailed of all Sandro's pictures, measures six feet by six. Like Augustine in the St. Barnabas picture, the Evangelist is occupied with his book and pen, while an eagle stands behind him; the Baptist, carrying his tall staff and banderole, "Behold the Lamb of God," is very nobly drawn, recalling in handling the figure of the "Centaur." But the picture is not a happy one; it is set and conventional, the result of great skill and labour, but little love.

The same must be said of the "Coronation of the Virgin" in the Florence Academy, one of Sandro's largest tempera works, an upright altar-piece measuring 12 feet by 8, commissioned by the guild of gold-workers for Savonarola's Church of

**PLATE VIII.—THE VIRGIN AND CHILD BY AN OPEN
WINDOW. (From the panel in the National Gallery)**

Ascribed to Botticelli in the National Gallery catalogue. The painting is intimately related in all its parts to the work of the master, and suggests many important characteristics of his art. It may be regarded as an interesting school work.



San Marco. It is painted in two sections—like Titian's "Assumption"—the lower, containing four too carefully posing saints; the upper, a sort of tondo, with a golden ground, in which the figures of the Virgin and the Father are both obviously incommoded by the shape of the frame. But the picture is notable for its ring of dancing angels, and the plucked roses scattered among them are like those in the "Birth of Venus."

Much the same plan is adopted in the last of Sandro's paintings, which is evidently related to this one, the "Nativity" in the National Gallery, already referred to. Here again is an upper and a lower picture, and in the upper, the dancing angels re-appear against the "glory." Instead of roses, however, there are crowns and banderoles, and the angels carry olive branches. At the head of this picture is an inscription in base Greek which has been thus translated:

"This picture was painted by me, Alessandro, at the end of 1500, during the troubles of Italy, in the half time after the time which was prophesied in the eleventh chapter of St. John the Evangelist, and the Second Woe of the Apocalypse, and when Satan shall be loosed on the earth for three years and a half. After which the devil shall be enchained, and we shall see him trodden under foot as in this picture." It indicates Sandro's belief in a final reconciliation and justification, and refers plainly to the execution of Savonarola which had occurred just three and a half years before. Thus it forms a kind of sequel to the "Calumny." While the picture is somewhat naïvely explanatory, it is filled with intense feeling, and suggests the influence upon Sandro of the Frate's favourite master, Fra Angelico.¹

¹ There are many other uncertain pictures which were formerly credited to Botticelli; and several of these still parade under the master's name in our National Gallery. Neither Nos. 782 nor 1126

It is generally believed to be the last of his paintings, but it seems probable that the drawings to illustrate the Divine Comedy may belong to an even later time. They were made for a second-cousin and namesake of the Magnificent, Lorenzo di Pier Francesco, who died in 1503 and was a patron of Michael Angelo as well as of Sandro. The original MS. was purchased about the beginning of last century by the then Duke of Hamilton, but was sold in 1882 to the Prussian Government. It is now in the Berlin Museum, and contains eighty-five

is by Sandro. But the genuine works in London include the attractive portrait of a young Florentine (No. 626); and the two "Adorations" ascribed to his pupil Filippino Lippi (592, 1033). The Print-Room in the British Museum has the exquisite drawing of the "Abundance" (Silver-point). In the basement of the National Gallery are copies (Arundel Society) of the Sixtine Frescoes, the "Birth of Venus," "Spring," and the best of the Lemmi frescoes. Facsimiles of the drawings for the Divine Comedy have been published. The other London pictures usually accredited to Sandro are the "Madonna" (partly by his hand) in Mr. Heseltine's collection and the panels already referred to in that of Dr. Mond, all belonging to his later years. The former shows the use Botticelli made of gold to give a sunny sheen between the spectator and distant hillside.

drawings in silver-point, finished with pen and ink. Eight other drawings belonging to the same series are in the Vatican Library. As eight are still missing, the complete series would have consisted of a hundred, in addition to the chart of the Inferno.

The drawings vary much in value and interest. Many of them are deficient in both respects; but some are perfect examples of his art. Such is the design for Paradiso I., with its slender trees bowing their tops to the morning breeze in the meadows watered by the circling stream Eunoë, over which Beatrice and Dante rise together against the wind, lifted by the light of Divine Love. It is full of aspiration and wide air, and has a curious Japanese quality. Very different in suggestion is that of the Chained Giants (Inferno XXXI.) which recalls some early German work, and reminds us that Sandro may have been influenced by the

drawings of Schongauer, and other Northern artists and designers. Vasari says that Botticelli was a prolific designer, and some of his drawings, notably the exquisite "Abundance," in the British Museum, are among his finest works.

V

In reviewing the subjects chosen by Sandro for his pictures, one is struck by certain characteristic omissions. With the exception of a most perfunctory and even grotesque panel of Christ rising from the Sepulchre, forming part of the S. Barnabas predella, of the doubtful "Pieta" at Munich, which may have been partially executed by Sandro after Savonarola's great sermons in Holy Week, and the figure of Christ thrice introduced as an afterthought into the first of the Sixtine frescoes; Botticelli

has only painted the central figure of Christian art as an infant. Twice only has he introduced the figure of God the Father into his work, and then without distinction. His devotional pictures represent a very young Madonna, with a chubby but thoughtful child, and, where there are other figures, either an aged patriarchal Joseph, or one or more attendant or messenger angels, winged in the later work, and certain saints. His favourite amongst these was Augustine.

Botticelli is at his best when he escapes from conventionality of subject, and is able to give wing to a lyrical imagination comparable to that of Shelley. He is one of those who feel the wind of the spirit blowing out toward new worlds. He loved the wind, and all things that the wind caresses, trees, draperies, floating hair, and the naked body. Also he loved the light and hated darkness. He had inspired moments when he beheld

that the old order of the mediæval world had already passed away, and the hearts of men were turning to the pure worship of living incarnate loveliness—the mystery of a re-born and immortal pleasure, Venus Anadyomene, beheld with mystic sight. But in that age it was a prophetic vision, and his own eyes failed him. He died in a time of darkness. For four centuries his visions were forgotten, to be beheld again by us with a renewal of the wonder and aspiration, the passionate desire for freedom and for beauty, out of which they came.

EB
4.6.65

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

DO NOT REMOVE THIS CARD

